

Perhaps one of the most common theological views in the Christian culture is the charismatic view. All of us have met charismatics, many have been through a charismatic period of understanding the Bible, and each of us have been blessed by charismatics who express their faith in solidly committed and tangible ways.

But I am not a charismatic.

I was raised in a non-charismatic home and church. I knew there were people who spoke in tongues, believed in a "second blessing," claimed to receive prophecies concerning the future, had a "word of knowledge" about some current event, and more. But this was not who I was. I couldn't have really told you why they were charismatic nor why I wasn't. I knew that they believed the Bible to be the inerrant word of God, and I did too. I knew they loved the Lord deeply, and I did too. I knew they thought I was wrong and missing out on the "full Gospel," but I thought they were wrong and were motivated by emotions rather than the Scripture. But is there more to the story?

CHARISMATICS IN AMERICAN CULTURE

Charismatics are deeply devoted to their faith, often showing this through speaking in tongues, prophecies, and seeking direct experiences with the Holy Spirit. This devotion is both personal and communal, evident in their vibrant worship settings.

In the U.S., charismatics have influenced society significantly, leading to large congregations and movements. Charismatic leaders often gain cultural influence, using media like TV, radio, and digital platforms to reach wider audiences. Their community and charitable activities demonstrate their faith and values.

The Azusa Street Revival in 1906, led by William J. Seymour, is a key event in charismatic history, marking the start of modern Pentecostalism. It featured intense spiritual experiences and drew diverse crowds, spreading Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity globally.

Notable figures include Aimee Semple McPherson, who founded the Foursquare Church in the 1920s, and Oral Roberts, a mid-20th-century televangelist who founded Oral Roberts University. The Toronto Blessing in 1994, with its unusual physical manifestations, impacted the global charismatic movement.

Contemporary figures like Benny Hinn and Reinhard Bonnke have continued to shape the movement through healing crusades and large evangelistic campaigns. Charismatics have also innovatively used TV to spread their message, with networks like Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) expanding their reach and fostering a global community. This media presence has normalized charismatic practices and supported various initiatives, amplifying their global impact.

CHARISMATIC CHURCHES

Charismatic churches include various denominations and independent congregations, each with unique traits and an emphasis on the Holy Spirit's gifts.

The Assemblies of God (AoG) is a prominent charismatic denomination, founded in the early 20th century. Rooted in Pentecostalism, the AoG emphasizes the Holy Spirit's baptism, speaking in tongues, prophecy, healing, and other spiritual gifts. Known for vibrant worship, missionary work, and community outreach, the AoG has a global presence.

Pentecostal churches share the AoG's beliefs, focusing on experiential faith, the Holy Spirit's baptism, and signs like speaking in tongues and healing. Pentecostalism has led to many denominations and independent churches worldwide, all committed to fervent faith and direct encounters with the Holy Spirit.

Calvary Chapel, founded by Chuck Smith in the 1960s, is a mildly charismatic movement known for verse-by-verse Bible teaching and balanced views on spiritual gifts. While it believes in spiritual gifts' continuation, its services are more subdued than traditional Pentecostal or charismatic churches, focusing on Scripture and the Holy Spirit's work.

Nondenominational charismatic churches blend contemporary worship, dynamic preaching, and emphasis on the Holy Spirit's gifts. They are diverse in practices and beliefs but generally focus on personal and communal Holy Spirit encounters.

SO CLOSE, YET SO DIFFERENT

Despite their differences, charismatics share core beliefs and values with conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists:

1. **Biblical Authority:** Both uphold the Bible as the inerrant word of God and ultimate guide for faith.
2. **Personal Relationship with Christ:** Emphasize the importance of a personal relationship with Jesus and salvation through faith.
3. **Evangelism and Missions:** Committed to spreading the Gospel through evangelism and missions.
4. **Moral Standards:** Adhere to traditional Christian moral standards, advocating societal values based on biblical principles.
5. **Prayer and Worship:** Value prayer and worship, seeking a deep connection with God.
6. **Community and Fellowship:** Place high importance on gathering for worship, study, and support.
7. **Love for Israel:** Carry a spiritual burden and love for Israel, often politically active on its behalf.
8. **Eschatology:** Share views on the second coming of Christ, the rapture, and final judgment.

In summary, despite differences in spiritual gifts and supernatural experiences, charismatics share a common foundation in many core aspects of Christian faith with conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists.

CORE TENETS

Charismatic theology centers on the belief that the Holy Spirit's gifts, as described in the New Testament, remain active today. Key tenets include:

1. **Continuation of Spiritual Gifts:** Gifts like prophecy, tongues, healing, and miracles are still present, rejecting the cessationist view.
2. **Baptism in the Holy Spirit:** A distinct experience after salvation, often marked by speaking in tongues.
3. **Prophecy and Words of Knowledge:** God still speaks through prophetic words and knowledge to guide and encourage believers.
4. **Healing and Miracles:** Belief in divine healing and miracles in response to prayer and faith.
5. **Empowerment for Ministry:** Gifts empower believers for ministry and service to build up the church.
6. **Spiritual Warfare:** Engagement in prayer and intercession to combat demonic forces and advance God's kingdom.

Non-charismatic evangelicals may recognize some of these aspects but not to the extent of being labeled charismatic.

THE GREAT DIVIDE

se things, what is the dividing line? How do charismatic Christians read the same Bible, give it the same authority as non-charismatic Christians, yet come out so different in their belief systems?

In other words, *why are some people charismatics?*

I think the singular belief that all charismatics must have is this:

👉 **We are in the last days, and thus the signs and wonders of the last days are relevant.**

Charismatics believe that we have been living in the "last days" ever since the day of Pentecost, as described in the Book of Acts. This belief is rooted in the idea that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost marked the beginning of a new era in God's plan for humanity, an era characterized by the active presence and work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers.

One of the key scriptural supports for this belief comes from the Apostle Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost. In Acts 2:16-17, Peter explains the miraculous events occurring around them by quoting the prophet Joel:

"But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams."

Peter's declaration that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy indicates that the "last days" began with the advent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. This interpretation suggests that the period from Pentecost to the present day is considered the "last days."

Other passages often used to show our "last days" status are James 5:3, 8; 1 Peter 4:7, and 1 John 2:18, each of which support the belief that the "last days" began with the ministry of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

This is why charismatic churches are often very strong in eschatology and prophecy issues. Their belief in the continued operation of spiritual gifts, including prophecy, and their conviction that we are living in the "last days" as described in the New Testament, naturally leads to a focus on eschatology. They emphasize the relevance of signs and wonders, viewing them as indicators of the Holy Spirit's active presence and as fulfillment of biblical prophecy. This eschatological perspective shapes their teachings, worship, and community life, making prophecy and end-times events central themes in charismatic theology.

SIGNS OF THE LAST DAYS

Based on the idea that Peter announced the arrival of the "last days" and thus the Joel 2:28-29 prophecy is being fulfilled, charismatic theology is almost a complete logical necessity. Both Joel, Peter, James, and John are perfectly clear: **THE SENDING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT INITIATES THE LAST DAYS**. Beyond that, the last-days gifts of the Holy Spirit are seen and taught from Acts through Revelation, virtually without exception. Furthermore, only one verse in the New Testament hints that these gifts may cease.

So let's take a look at what the New Testament says about these gifts.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS

The Apostle Paul discusses spiritual gifts extensively in his letters, particularly in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, emphasizing their diversity and common source in the Holy Spirit. He lists gifts such as wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues, and interpretation of tongues, noting that every believer will have one of these manifestations.

In 1 Corinthians 12:28-31, Paul elaborates on various roles within the church, acknowledging that not everyone will have the same gifts and urging believers to desire the best gifts while highlighting the way of love.

In Romans 12:6-8, Paul addresses spiritual gifts again, encouraging believers to use their gifts according to the grace given to them, whether it is prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, ruling, or showing mercy.

Overall, Paul's teachings emphasize the diversity of spiritual gifts, their source in the Holy Spirit, their purpose for the common good, and the importance of exercising them with love and humility.

PROPHECY

In the New Testament, the gift of prophecy is prominently featured in the Acts of the Apostles and the writings of Paul. After Pentecost, several instances of prophecy are recorded. For example, the prophet Agabus foretold a great famine (Acts 11:27-28) and later predicted Paul's imprisonment in Jerusalem (Acts 21:10-11).

In Paul's letters, he discusses the importance and role of prophecy within the church (1 Corinthians 14:1). He explains that prophecy is valuable for the edification, exhortation, and comfort of the church, emphasizing its importance over speaking in tongues because it builds up the church as a whole (1 Corinthians 14:5).

Through these passages, it is evident that Paul viewed prophecy as a crucial gift for the edification and guidance of the Christian community. He valued it highly and encouraged believers to seek this gift for the benefit of the church.

HEALING AND MIRACLES

In the Book of Acts and Pauline writings, many healings and miracles post-Pentecost show the Holy Spirit's power in the early church.

- Acts 3:1-10: Peter and John heal a lame man at the Beautiful gate. Peter says, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk." The man walks and praises God.
- Acts 5:12-16: Apostles perform many signs and wonders, including healing the sick and tormented. People bring the sick to the streets, and Peter's shadow heals them.
- Acts 9:32-35: Peter heals Aeneas, bedridden for eight years. Peter says, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed." Aeneas rises, and many turn to the Lord.
- Acts 14:8-10: Paul heals a crippled man in Lystra. Paul says, "Stand upright on thy feet." The man leaps and walks.
- Acts 16:16-18: Paul casts out a spirit from a slave girl in Philippi. He commands the spirit to leave in the name of Jesus Christ, and it departs.
- Acts 19:11-12: Paul performs extraordinary miracles in Ephesus. Handkerchiefs and aprons that touched Paul heal the sick and expel evil spirits.
- 2 Corinthians 12:12: Paul mentions "signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds" among the Corinthians, validating his apostolic authority and the Holy Spirit's power.

These passages show ongoing miraculous healings and signs among early believers, reinforcing the Holy Spirit's work.

EDIFICATION OF THE CHURCH THROUGH APOSTLES AND PROPHETS

Apostles and prophets played crucial roles in the early church post-Pentecost, as described in Acts and Pauline writings. Their key functions included:

1. **Guidance:** They provided spiritual direction (Acts 13:2).
2. **Miracles:** Apostles performed miracles, proving their ministry (Acts 5:12).
3. **Revelation:** Prophets offered insights from God (Acts 11:28).
4. **Encouragement:** They strengthened the believers (Acts 15:32).

1 Corinthians 12:28 highlights the importance of apostles and prophets in building a strong, unified early church, showcasing the Holy Spirit's work through them.

THAT'S A ROBUST ARGUMENT!

The biblical testimony I've presented for the working of the Holy Spirit using charisma is robust, both through example and direct instruction. The Greek word "charisma" (χάρισμα) means "gift of grace" and refers to the spiritual gifts given by the Holy Spirit to believers. The term "charismatic" comes from this Greek word, indicating those who believe in and practice these spiritual gifts.

Throughout the New Testament, there are numerous accounts and instructions regarding the **CHARISMA**. The New Testament consistently demonstrates that the **CHARISMA** were not only present from the earliest days beginning at Pentecost, but were also present and taught decades later. This argument forms a core tenet of charismatic theology, highlighting the ongoing work and power of the Holy Spirit.

To simply say "I'm not charismatic" or "I'm a cessationist" requires addressing a significant body of scripture, much of which is Pauline. If we truly believe in the authority of the Bible, we cannot dismiss these scriptures merely because they do not align with our heritage or tradition. As people of the book, we are called to follow what is written in the book, whether it makes us comfortable or not.

So, as you can see, there is a robust and Biblical argument that explains why some people are charismatic.

THE SINGULAR DIFFERENCE

So with all of this, how can I, a preacher who is doggedly driven by the plain teaching of Scripture, not be a charismatic? Honestly, it's all in a singular difference.

Earlier I stated that every charismatic needs this tenet:

We are in the last days, and thus the signs and wonders of the last days are relevant.

But what if we are **NOT** in the last days?

I believe that the Apostle Paul was given a unique revelation, often referred to as "the mystery," which set the last days into the future. According to this belief, we are currently living in what Paul describes as the "dispensation of the grace of God," as explained in Ephesians 3:1-12 and elsewhere in his epistles. This dispensation is characterized by the grace of God being extended to all people, Jew and Gentile alike, without the immediate signs and wonders that characterized the early church's "last days" period.

Thus, our doctrine today is based on this dispensation of grace rather than last days doctrine.* According to this view, the signs and wonders that are often associated with charismatic theology are not a feature of the current dispensation. Instead, we are to live by the teachings that Paul received and shared, which emphasize the grace of God, faith in Christ, and the unity of all believers.

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- See the author's book, *Paul's Proprietary Program* for more on this subject.